

## Alternative medicine



Alternative medicine is, by definition, an alternative to something else: modern, Western medicine. But the term 'alternative' can be misleading, even off-putting for some people. Few practitioners of homeopathy, acupuncture, herbalism and the like regard their therapies as complete substitutes for modern medicine. Rather, they consider their disciplines as supplementary to orthodox medicine. The problem is that many doctors refuse even to recognize 'natural' or alternative medicine, to do so calls for a radically different view of health, illness and cure. But whatever doctors may think, the demand for alternative forms of medical therapy is stronger than ever before, as the limitations of modern medical science become more widely understood.

Alternative therapies are often dismissed by orthodox medicine because they are sometimes administered by people with no formal medical training. But, in comparison with many traditional therapies, western medicine as we know it today is a very recent phenomenon. Until only 150 years ago, herbal medicine and simple inorganic compounds were the most effective treatments available. Despite the medical establishment's intolerant attitude, alternative therapies are being accepted by more and more doctors, and the World Health Organization has agreed to promote the integration of proven, valuable, 'alternative' knowledge and skills in western medicine.